



Item Number: 23

**City Council / Board of Directors**

**Written Communications**

**Meeting of: July 16, 2024**

**Submitted By:**

Scott Webb, Deputy City Manager

**Subject:**

Dissolution of the Homelessness Solutions Task Force

**Recommendation:**

That the Honorable City Council find that the Homelessness Solutions Task Force has fulfilled its intent and hereby takes action to dissolve the Task Force until such time reactivation is needed based on a determined need.

**Fiscal Impact:**

The proposed action does not have a fiscal impact on the budget.

**Strategic Plan Goal:**

This project aligns with Goal D, Strategy 4 in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, "Evaluate the effectiveness of coordination of homelessness services."

**Background:**

In August 2018, the City Council directed staff to schedule a public workshop within a six-month period for discussion regarding homelessness within the City. On January 29, 2019, the City Council held a Special Meeting, including a homeless issue workshop. During this workshop, staff summarized homeless demographics, impacts, contributing factors, current efforts, and potential policy recommendations. The staff's presentation was followed by input from public stakeholders.

On February 5, 2019, the City Council directed staff to create a staff-led Homelessness Solutions Task Force (HSTF) with key external stakeholders from the community to seek solutions to homelessness within the City. The City Council charged the HSTF with:

1. Identifying strategic goals and estimated resources needed to accomplish such goals;
2. Identifying funding to implement programs to benefit the homeless community;

3. Identifying partnerships that can be leveraged to achieve the goals of preventing homelessness in the City; and
4. Developing policy recommendations and processes to measure the effectiveness of new and existing policies and programs designed to prevent homelessness.

This direction evolved into the development of a strategic action plan to address the issues of homelessness in our community. Following an application and selection period, the HSTF began meeting monthly in May 2019 with the following representatives from the community:

#### External Stakeholders

1. Emergency or Short Term Shelter
2. Meal-Providing Service
3. Faith-Based Organization
4. Local School District
5. Local Clinic or Hospital
6. Real Estate Community
7. Elderly Community
8. Homeless Community
9. Homeless Youth
10. Alcohol & Drug Services
11. Victims of Domestic Violence

#### City of Victorville Staff

1. City Manager
2. Deputy City Manager
3. Fire Chief
4. City Planner
5. Code Enforcement Official
6. Director of Community Services
7. Economic Development Manager
8. Homelessness Solutions Coordinator

#### Other Agencies

1. Chamber of Commerce
2. Board of Supervisors – 1<sup>st</sup> District
3. San Bernardino County Housing Authority
4. San Bernardino County Probation
5. San Bernardino County Adult and Aging Services
6. San Bernardino County Behavioral Health Services
7. San Bernardino County Sheriff's H.O.P.E Team
8. Victorville Police Department – M.E.T. Team

The Homelessness Solutions Coordinator's role was aimed at helping to develop methodologies that are consistent with best practices, as well as structuring the City's approach to be conducive with the County's Continuum of Care system and other

regulatory frameworks. Both the HSTF and the Homelessness Solutions Coordinator played essential roles in outlining strategies to address the complex issues related to homelessness. Following several HSTF meetings and roundtable discussions, the proposed Homelessness Solutions Strategic Action Plan was completed on October 8, 2019 and recommended by the HSTF for adoption by the City Council.

In November 2019, the City Council approved the Homelessness Solutions Strategic Action Plan (hereinafter “Plan”), which is included as Attachment A, Exhibit A to this report. The Plan utilizes a multi-faceted approach to outline actions, goals, and objectives directly related to homeless intervention, outreach, and prevention. The Plan strengthened our City's response system and established a platform that allowed the public and private sector to engage, stay informed, and volunteer. It also identified short- and long-term measures that helped to minimize homelessness and improve community conditions for Victorville residents, businesses, and visitors. The Plan laid the foundation for a systematic response to help get unsheltered homeless individuals off the streets and connected to housing and supportive services. This helped promote self-sufficiency and long-term stability. It also allowed for the collaboration of various stakeholders and the mobilization of public and private resources, including State and Federal grants, to improve policy, programs, and housing resources needed to reduce homelessness.

The HSTF outlined ten measurable goals within the Plan that have been completed or are ongoing initiatives being carried on. The following list outlines the actions that were taken to address, as follows:

1. Creation of a Homelessness Solutions Task Force: Completed in 2019.
2. Hiring a Homelessness Solutions Coordinator: The position was hired in 2019 and a Homelessness Solutions Manager was added during the construction of the Wellness Center, a City-owned 170-bed interim housing navigation center, in 2022.
3. Enhanced Shelter Operations: The City is currently using the Coordinated Entry System (CES) to assess individuals and link them to the most appropriate level of care. Our partnership with the CES lead (211/United Way Inland SoCal) and the regional CES Hub (Family Assistance Program) has helped the City navigate individuals into pathways to permanent housing solutions. The development and commencement of Wellness Center operations has enabled the City to provide a housing-first, low-barrier Navigation and Recuperative Care center with onsite supportive services and housing navigators helping unsheltered individuals and families to access crisis services immediately. The service-enriched shelter operations act as a day center and central hub to triage individuals experiencing homelessness, and those who are at risk of becoming homeless, to appropriate community and government agencies for improved service coordination.
4. Housing First Model: Our low-barrier Wellness Center has provided additional interim housing units, thereby expanding the supply of emergency shelter beds.

We have also partnered with the Housing Authority to bring 31 permanent supportive housing units online through the Desert Haven Project. Furthermore, through partnerships, we have referred many clients to local transitional and permanent housing solutions. The City has partnered with a supportive services operator, Symba Center, that has utilized components of rapid rehousing, transitional housing, and permanent housing to stabilize homeless persons and families. The City is also pursuing funding for the development of a phase two of the Wellness Center, which will expand our City's housing and/or services.

5. Homelessness Prevention: The City has expanded partnerships with those who directly assist individuals on the verge of homelessness. Through these partnerships and our enhanced outreach team, the City has practiced responsive and effective prevention assistance that connects education with life skills training and resource assistance.
6. Outreach and Visibility: With guidance from the HSTF, the City has increased public awareness campaigns that educate the public and business community on best practices when engaging with people experiencing homelessness. This is highlighted through our Healthy and Sustainable Giving model. At many of our HSTF meetings, we addressed different discussion topics to help educate staff, non-profits, and the public in various areas related to homelessness. The City enhanced its website to provide information, links, and directions on how to obtain services or how to volunteer. The City continues to support community outreach efforts and collaborate with local agencies to link services better and leverage resources.
7. Trespassing/Private Property: Utilizing guidance from our Code Enforcement Official and the Task Force, our Homeless Engagement Team works closely with property owners and encourages business owners to be a part of the solution, utilizing 602 Notices and trespass agreements to help alleviate the negative impact of homelessness. Our City has also created awareness campaigns to help educate the public on ways to find more sustainable ways to assist those experiencing homelessness. Two notable campaigns were Healthy and Sustainable Giving and Positive Change not Spare Change. To further our efforts towards a balanced approach to addressing homelessness, the City Council approved an ordinance, that became effective in January 2024, to address trespassing, camping, and public infrastructure evenly. This ordinance would not have been possible without the discussions and feedback received from the HSTF since its inception.
8. Vandalism, Theft and Misuse: The City Council has taken action to update the municipal code to address the misuse of public infrastructure and property. Our Homeless Engagement Team (HET) has established methods to successfully address issues related to disruption of public services and misuse of public and private infrastructure or property. One specific example is our enhanced outreach and case management that educates our unhoused individuals about service availability and anti-camping laws.

9. Homeless Encampments: The City continues demonstrating its commitment to assisting our homeless population, impacted residents, and business owners. It has expanded outreach efforts by assigning four full-time Homeless Engagement Team (HET) Officers and a HET Supervisor. Our engagement officers continue establishing positive relationships with our homeless population, encouraging them to accept shelter and services and helping them take advantage of available local resources like substance abuse counseling, care for their animals, job placement, and other living assistance. Our approach to homeless outreach is an essential community service that allows our engagement officers to build rapport, trust, and improved communication with our local homeless community and assist impacted residents and business owners. The HET Team is based out of the Wellness Center and helps provide clients with a warm hand-off and immediate relief from living on the streets while providing them safety and links to community support services.

In 2023, we added a partnership with our Wellness Center supportive services provider, Symba Center. Symba Center provides additional outreach, engagement, case management, and street medicine resources for our city's most vulnerable population through this partnership. We also collaborate with the County's outreach teams, specifically the Sheriff's HOPE Team and the INN Roads team to provide additional resources for our unhoused population. Lastly, we have established a robust client management system and improved data collection to provide more efficient services and reporting.

10. Strategic Partnerships: The City has partnered with numerous non-governmental agencies to assist our unsheltered and sheltered populations. Further, we have partnered with government agencies to help address homelessness in our City. Most recently, our City partnered with the County of San Bernardino to provide outreach and engagement services in specific encampment areas and assist clients with getting linked to permanent housing solutions via monies from the Encampment Resolution Funding Program. The City will continue to work collectively with community stakeholders and government agencies to streamline processes, secure funding and improve coordination to mitigate homelessness. Future agreements will be established and ongoing meetings at local, regional, and county levels will be held to outline the purpose and scope of partnerships, reduce duplication of services, and establish a regional focus.

During the 2024 Point-In-Time Count (PITC), the City saw a reduction in transitional housing, county voucher programs, motel voucher availability, and the closure of the High Desert Homeless Services family shelter. As San Bernardino County saw a 2.6% increase in unsheltered individuals, the City saw only a 1% increase. Considering the margin of error and the fact that 43% of the individuals counted in Victorville indicated they were homeless for the first time in the last 12 months, a trivial PITC increase from 607 to 611 shows a positive trajectory in our efforts to combat homelessness. With the introduction of our new City ordinance, the opening of our Wellness Center Campus, and

increased outreach efforts, 2025 PITC data should begin to reflect positively on our efforts.

**Discussion:**

The HSTF was pivotal in establishing guidance and creating a roadmap to address the ongoing, systematic social issues related to homelessness and its impact on the community. Nonetheless, the Task Force was never intended to be a standing committee and was explicitly created to address the following four tasks at the Council's request:

1. Identifying strategic goals and estimated resources needed to accomplish such goals;
2. Identifying funding to implement programs to benefit the homeless community;
3. Identifying partnerships that can be leveraged to achieve the goals of preventing homelessness in the City; and
4. Developing policy recommendations and processes to measure the effectiveness of new and existing policies and programs designed to prevent homelessness.

After a thorough review of the actions taken and the guidance provided by the HSTF, as well as actions taken by City staff and the City Council, these four goals have been noticeably accomplished. While homelessness remains a top priority for the City, the HSTF has provided a foundational guiding document, in the Homelessness Solutions Strategic Action Plan, that gives the City a framework to build upon. Therefore, staff recommends that the City Council approve the dissolution of the HSTF, with the acknowledgement that the HSTF could be reactivated in the future should the need arise.

Moving forward, staff will continue partnerships with outside entities and continue to have a footprint at the community, regional, and county levels. In addition to having City staff available to engage with members of the public, the public now has Desert Regional Steering Committee (DRSC) meetings available to engage at the local and regional level. Regional committees, such as the DRSC, were created by the County's Interagency Council on Homelessness in 2020 and meet monthly. Moreover, the City is emphasizing efforts related to the beginning stages of our Community Revitalization and Investment Authority (CRIA), which will help revitalize our disadvantaged communities through planning and financing infrastructure improvements, economic development activities, and affordable housing. Staff will also continue to address homelessness through our citywide Strategic Action Plan, which incorporates reducing homelessness as a goal and providing periodic updates to the Council.

Staff is available for any questions.

**Attachments:**     A. Resolution No. 19-089: Establishing a Homelessness Solutions Strategic Action Plan